## Activity Explanation/Instructions

### Activity 1 — Choose a Favorite Quotation

This activity requires each student to choose a particularly meaningful and relevant quotation from Coach John Wooden and explain how it applies to debate.

Review the quotations in the “Wooden Quotations” hat. There are 37 quotations from *Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court*. Choose one that resonates with you. In at least one paragraph, explain why you chose the quotation and how it can be applied to debate. Be prepared to share your explanation with the group.

### Activity 2 — Identify a Weakness

After selecting and explaining your favorite quotation, choose another quotation that identifies an issue you struggle with as a debater. In at least one paragraph, explain why you choose the quotation and how it resonates with you. Be prepared to share your explanation with the group.

### Activity 3 — Eight Suggestions for Succeeding

Wooden offers the following eight suggestions for succeeding:

1. Fear no opponent. *Respect* every opponent.
2. Remember, it’s the perfection of the smallest details that make big things happen.
3. Keep in mind that hustle makes up for many a mistake.
4. Be more interested in character than reputation.
5. Be quick, but don’t hurry.
6. Understand that the harder you work, the more luck you will have.
7. Know that valid self-analysis is crucial for improvement.
8. Remember that there is no substitute for hard work and careful planning. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

For each suggestion, explain how it can be applied to debate.

## Wooden Quotations

### 1 Preparation Is the Prize

Cervantes wrote, “The journey is better than the inn.” He is right and that is why I derived my greatest satisfaction out of the preparation—the “journey”—day after day, week after week, year after year.

Your journey is the important thing. A score, a trophy, a ribbon is simply the inn.

Thus, there were many, many games that gave me as much pleasure as any of the ten national championship games we won, simply because we prepared fully and played near our highest level of ability.

The so-called importance of a particular game didn’t necessarily add to the satisfaction I felt in preparing for the contest. It was the journey I prized above all else.

### 2 A Successful Journey Is the Destination

You know where you’d like to go, whether it’s to a national championship in basketball or a particular goal in your business or life. You must also realize that this goal will be simply a by-product of all the hard work and good thinking you do along the way—your preparation. The preparation is where success is truly found.

Set your compass in a chosen direction and then focus your attention and efforts completely on the journey of preparation. A successful journey becomes your destination and is where your real accomplishment lies.

For example, let’s say Mr. Grigsby owns a company that manufactures shoes. I believe shoes are simply a by-product for his company. Their real product is the teamwork of people within the company, along with the manufacturing plant and other elements of the business that the leader, Mr. Grigsby, has brought together.

How his company’s people work as a team is the product. Shoes are a by-product.

Likewise, in my coaching I informed every player who came under my supervision that the outcome of a game was simply a by-product of the effort we made to prepare. They understood our destination was a successful journey—namely, total, complete, and detailed preparation.

Too often we neglect our journey in our eagerness or anxiety about reaching the goal.

If Mr. Grigsby and his team do this they will manufacture poorly made shoes. If we had done this, UCLA would never have won national championships. If you do it in your life or profession, you will find yourself discontent and operating well below your level of competency.

### 3 Failures and Mistakes

I had mistakes, plenty, but I had no failures. We may not have won a championship every year. We may have lost games. But we had no failures. You never fail if you know in your heart that you did the best of which you are capable. I did my best. That is all I could do.

Are you going to make mistakes? Of course. But it is not failure if you make the full effort.

I told my players many times, “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.” If you prepare properly, you may be outscored but *you will never lose*. I wanted our players to believe that to their very souls because I know it is the truth. You always win when you make the full effort to do the best of which you’re capable.

I also know that only one person on earth knows if you made your best effort: not your coach, not your employer, not your husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, brother or sister. The only person who knows is you. You can fool everyone else.

### 4 Blaming Others

You can make mistakes, but you aren’t a failure until you start blaming others for those mistakes. When you blame others you are trying to excuse yourself. When you make excuses you can’t properly evaluate yourself. Without proper self-evaluation, failure is inevitable.

### 5 The Desire to Win

Players fifty years ago wanted to win just as much as players today. Foot soldiers a thousand years ago wanted to win the battle as much as combat troops today. Athletes today have no greater desire to win than athletes at the first Olympic Games. The desire then and now is the same.

The difference is that everybody worries about it more today because of the media and the attention they give to the question of who’s winning and who’s losing.

Did I win? Did I lose? Those are the wrong questions. The correct question is: Did I make my best effort? That’s what matters. The rest of it just gets in the way.

In classical times, the courageous struggle for a noble cause was considered success in itself. Sadly, that ideal has been forgotten. But it is well worth remembering.

### 6 The Infection of Success

You become infected with success when you think that your past is going to have an impact on your future. Oh, it might have an effect on the opposition in that your success may affect *their* thinking. Fine, but do not let it affect what you do.

Learn from the past, don’t live in the past. The infection of success can lead you to live in the past, to believe that what happened before is *automatically* going to happen again. When that occurs you have been infected by success.

You have control only over the present, right now. Let me prove it to you. I ask you to do this: change the past. Even the smallest, most incidental, least important thing that happened in the past. Go ahead and show that you can change it.

The future? Again I ask you, change right now something in the future. Can you? Of course not. Your control exists now, in the present, right here.

How you respond to past success can be damaging if you let it infect your thinking, if you let it diminish your preparation in the present for the future. Then you’ve been infected by success.

### 7 Underdogs

I have never gone into a game thinking we were going to lose. Never. Even though there have been games where the experts said there was no way we could win. Even if we were big underdogs I always felt anything could happen. Often enough, I was right.

That’s also why I never assumed we were going to win.

### 8 Pressure

The only pressure that amounts to a hill of beans is the pressure *you* put on yourself. If you’re trying to live up to expectations put on you by the media, parents, fans, your employer, or whatever else there may be, it’s going to affect you adversely because it brings on worry and anxiety. I think that is the tendency of people who choke under pressure. They’re thinking about living up to the expectations of everybody else instead of just doing their job the best they can.

### 9 Hindsight

You can always look back and see where you might have done something differently, changed this or that. If you can learn something, fine, but never second-guess yourself. It’s wasted effort.

If I put a substitution in during a game at UCLA and he immediately makes a mistake, even a stupid mistake, was my decision wrong? Absolutely not.

It just didn’t work out. That was the decision I made based on past experience and without emotionalism. I made it with reason, but it just didn’t work out. Things don’t always work out. It’s also true in life.

Does worrying about it, complaining about it, change it? Nope, it just wastes your time. And if you complain about it to other people, you’re also wasting their time. Nothing is gained by wasting all of that time.

### 10 The Realistic Optimist

I believe one of my strengths is my ability to keep negative thoughts out. I am an optimist. I believe this results from the fact that I set realistic goals—ones that are difficult to achieve, but within reach. You might say I’m a realistic optimist.

Goals should be difficult to achieve because those achieved with little effort are seldom appreciated, give little personal satisfaction, and are often not very worthwhile.

However, if you set goals that are so idealistic there’s no possibility of reaching them, you will eventually become discouraged and quit. They become counter-productive. Be a realistic optimist.

### 11 Hopes and Dreams

Having a dream is often like hoping for something. It’s easy to let our dreams and our hopes get away from reality.

Youngsters are told, “Think big. Anything is possible.” I would never go that strong. I want them to think *positively*, but when you think big you often start thinking too big, and I believe that can be very dangerous.

Wanting an unattainable goal will eventually produce a feeling of “What’s the use?” That feeling can carry over into other areas. That is bad.

A youngster may dream of being seven feet tall. Hoping for something of that nature is not productive. We should keep our dreams within the realm of possibility—difficult but possible—and make every effort to achieve them.

I have often been asked when I first started dreaming about winning a national championship. Was it at Indiana State Teachers College or after I arrived at UCLA? Perhaps while I was a college player? I never dreamed about winning a national championship. It happened before I even thought it was possible.

What I was dreaming about each year, if you want to call it that, was trying to produce the best basketball team we could be. My thoughts were directed toward preparation, our journey, not the results of the effort (such as winning national championships). That would simply have shifted my attention to the wrong area, hoping for something out of my control. Hoping doesn’t make it happen.

Mix idealism with realism and add hard work. This will often bring much more than you could ever hope for.

### 12 Paying The Price

People usually know what they should do to get what they want. They just won’t do it. They won’t pay the price.

Understand there is a price to be paid for achieving anything of significance. You must be willing to pay the price.

### 13 The Worthy Opponent

Can there be any great enjoyment or satisfaction in doing what everybody else can do? What joy can be derived in sports from overcoming someone who is not as capable as you are? But there is great joy and satisfaction in competing against an opponent who forces you to dig deep and produce your best.

That is the only way to get real joy out of the competition itself. The worthy opponent brings out the very best in you. This is thrilling.

### 14 Tall Versus “Tall”

I told my athletes in basketball, “I don’t care if you *are* tall, but I do care if you *play* tall.” It’s just another way of saying that I judged them by the level of effort they gave to the team’s journey.

That’s the standard of measurement I used. I could also have told them, “Show me what you can do, don’t tell me what you can do.”

Too often the big talkers are the little doers.

### 15 Peace of Mind

Without peace of mind, what do you have? Many people go through life unhappy with what they have regardless of how much they have. No matter how much they accumulate, they never achieve peace of mind because they want more. It never ends for them and they are forever unhappy. Usually it’s a result of comparing themselves to others, of trying to keep up with the Joneses.

Did I find peace of mind by winning a national championship in basketball in 1964? Then a second, a third, a fourth, and so on? No. I had my peace of mind as a coach long before a national championship was ever won.

### 16 Overachievers

No one is an overachiever. How can you rise *above* your level of competency? We’re all underachievers to different degrees. You may hear someone say that a certain individual “gave 110 percent.” How can that be? You can only give what you have, and you have only 100 percent.

I preferred to judge individuals on the basis of how close they came to giving 100 percent, knowing they would never reach perfection, and they would certainly never reach 110 percent of perfection, but perhaps they would operate near their level of competency when their greatest skill was needed.

### 17 Beating Yourself

The very worst thing you can do is to beat yourself. By that I mean not function to your level of competency because you didn’t put out your full effort in all ways.

Maybe you stayed out too late last night. Maybe you were too concerned with individual statistics. Maybe you thought you could just “turn it on” without proper preparation. Maybe you did some other things that were counterproductive, like being impatient.

In other words, you beat yourself. The other guy didn’t have to beat you. Now you’ve got something worth being ashamed of.

### 18 Winners Make the Most Mistakes

My coach at Purdue, Piggy Lambert, constantly reminded us: “The team that makes the most mistakes will probably win.”

That may sound a bit odd, but there is a great deal of truth in it. The *doer* makes mistakes. Coach Lambert taught me that mistakes come from doing, but so does success.

The individual who is mistake-free is also probably sitting around doing nothing. And that’s a very big mistake.

### 19 Characteristics of a Team Player

We all fit into different niches. Each of us must make the effort to contribute to the best of our ability according to our own individual talents. And then we put all the individual talents together for the highest good of the group.

Thus, I valued a player who cared for others and could lose himself in the group for the good of the group. I believe that quality makes for an outstanding player. It is also why the best players don’t always make the best team. I mean by this that a gifted player, or payers, who are not *team* players will ultimately hurt the team, whether it revolves around basketball or business.

Understanding that the good of the group comes first is fundamental to being a highly productive member of a *team*.

### 20 Why Teams Fail

No matter how great your product, if your sales department doesn’t produce, you won’t get the results you want. Different departments must all function well for the company to succeed. It takes all doing their best.

I told players at UCLA that we, as a team, are like a powerful car. Maybe a Bill Walton or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar or Michael Jordan is the big engine, but if one wheel is flat, we're going no place. And if we have brand new tires but the lug nuts are missing, the wheels come off. What good is the powerful engine now? It's no good at all.

A lug nut may seem like a little thing, but it's not. There's a role that each and every one of us must play. We may aspire to what we consider to be a larger role, or a more important role, but we cannot achieve that until we show that we are able to fulfill the role we are assigned. It's these little things that make the big things happen. The big engine is not going to work unless the little things are being done properly.

Remember that Michael Jordan was with the Chicago Bulls for several years before he ever played in a championship game. Was he talented? Of course he was, but that powerful engine called Air Jordan was in a car with some parts that were not functioning properly.

### 21 Orange Peels, Pride, and Productivity

I frequently received letters from custodians after we played an away game telling me our basketball team had left the locker room neater and cleaner than anyone who had visited during the year. The towels were put in bins, soap was picked up off the shower floor, and so forth.

The locker rooms were clean when we departed because I asked the players to pick up after themselves. I believe this is just common courtesy. Somebody's going to have to clean it up, and I see no reason why it shouldn't be the person who messed it up. Are managers and custodians the players' servants?

In basketball we often have orange slices or gum at the half. I see no reason why you should throw those orange peels or gum wrappers carelessly on the floor. There are receptacles for that. Again, it's just common courtesy.

As with many of the rules I had, there are other less obvious but equally important reasons for insisting on them. In this case, it goes to the image of the team, both our self-image and the image others have of us.

I think neatness and courtesy make you feel good about yourself. I believe individuals who feel good about themselves are more productive.

For this same reason, I asked players even during practice to keep shirts tucked in and socks pulled up.

I believe this encourages teamwork and team unity. It establishes a spirit of togetherness that helps mold the team into a solo unit. I really believe that. In fact, perhaps I should say I know it. I've seen it work.

### 22 Losing and Winning

Long before any championships were ever won at UCLA, I came to understand that losing is only temporary and not all-encompassing. You must simply study it, learn from it, and try hard not to lose the same way again. Then you must have the self-control to forget about it.

I've also learned that winning games, titles, and championships isn't all it's cracked up to be, and that getting there, the journey, is a lot more than it's cracked up to be.

Please understand that I wanted to win every single game I ever played in or coached. Absolutely. I wanted to win. But, I understood that ultimately the winning or losing may not be under my control. What was under my control was how I prepared myself and our team. I judged my success, my "winning," on that. It just made more sense.

I felt if we prepared fully we would do just fine. If we won, great; frosting on the cake. But, at no time did I consider winning to be the cake.

### 23 On Talent

Many athletes have tremendous God-given gifts, but they don’t focus on the development of those gifts. Who are these individuals? You’ve never heard of them—and you never will. It’s true in sports and it’s true everywhere in life.

Hard work is the difference. Very hard work.

### 24 Is My Ford Better than Your Cadillac?

Preparing UCLA for a basketball game with Louisville or Arizona or Duke or Michigan, I would tell my players, “We can’t control what those other fellows do to get ready. We can only control what we do to get ready. So let’s do our very best in that regard and hope that will be good enough, yes, to outscore them. But let’s not worry about that. Instead, let’s worry about our own preparation.”

Let’s say I want to build a car—maybe a Ford or a Chevrolet or a Plymouth. I want to build it the best I can possibly build it. Will it be better than a Cadillac or a Mercedes? That’s irrelevant.

If I’m building a Ford, I simply want to build the very best Ford I can build. That’s *all* I can do: to come close to *my* level of competency, not somebody else’s. I have nothing to do with theirs, only mine.

To worry about whether what I’m building is going to be better than what somebody else is building elsewhere is to worry needlessly. I believe that if I’m worried about what’s going on outside, it will detract from my preparation inside.

My concern, my focus, my total effort should be on building the very best Ford I can build. I did that in coaching high-school teams and in coaching college teams. My focus was on making that team, that group of individuals, the best they were capable of becoming, whether it was a Ford or a Cadillac.

Some years I understood we were building a Ford. Other years I felt we were building a Cadillac. The effort put forth in all years was the same: total.

And I was just as proud of our well-built Fords as of our well-built Cadillacs.

### 25 Recognizing a Champion

You are in the presence of a true competitor when you observe that he or she is indeed getting the most joy out of the most difficult circumstances. The real competitors love a tough situation. That’s when they focus better and function better. At moments of maximum pressure, they want the ball.

You begin to see it as time goes by. Not immediately, but gradually you see that real competitors relish the challenge, the bigger the better. The more difficult the game, the more they improve.

True competitors derive their greatest pleasure out of playing against the very best opponents, even though they may be outscored. The difficult challenge provides the rare opportunity to be their best.

Often great competitors don’t quite have the physical skills of more gifted players, but they get more out of what they have at moments of great pressure.

Thus, I base my judgment on not just what they had but how they used it. To what extent did they attempt to bring forth their abilities? To what extent did they accomplish that under maximum pressure?

This is how I identified competitors who had greatness within.

### 26 Being Too Competitive

Competitiveness must be focused exclusively on the process of what you are doing rather than the result of that effort (the so-called winning or losing). Otherwise you may lose self-control and become tight emotionally, mentally, and physically. I think someone who is too competitive as an individual is overly worried about the final score.

Therefore, I never mentioned winning or victory to my players. I never referred to “beating” an opponent.

Instead I constantly urged them to strive for the self-satisfaction that *always* comes from knowing you did the best you could to become the best of which you are capable. That’s what I wanted: the total effort. That was the measurement I used, never the final score.

### 27 Is Winning the Only Thing?

Mr. Vince Lombardi is supposed to have said, “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” Well, if he said that, I disagree. I believe making the total effort is everything. And that’s all I ever wanted and all I ever asked from myself or my players.

It’s all you should ever ask for or expect. Understand that you won’t actually ever become the best of which you are capable. That’s perfection. We can’t obtain perfection as I understand it. But we can work, and work *hard*, toward obtaining it. If you do that, you will never lose, in sports or in life.

### 28 Tricks of the Trade

If you spend too much time learning the tricks of the trade, you may not learn the trade.

There are no shortcuts. If you’re working on finding a short cut, the easy way, you’re not working hard enough on the fundamentals. You may get away with it for a spell, but there is no substitute for the basics. And the first basic is good, old-fashioned hard work.

### 29 Adversity Makes You Stronger

Most all good things come through adversity. There's a poem that says:

*Looking back it seems to me,*

*All the grief that had to be*

*Left me when the pain was o'er*

*Stronger than I was before*

*—Unknown*

I believe that. We get stronger when we test ourselves. Adversity can make us better. We must be challenged to improve, and adversity is the challenger.

### 30 Character Creates Longevity

I believe ability can get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there. A big part of character is the self-discipline needed to avoid complacency, resist temptation, and understand that past success doesn’t guarantee future success.

It’s so easy to relax, to cut corners, to let down after you’ve reached your goal, and begin thinking you can just “turn it on” automatically, without proper preparation. It takes real character to keep working as hard or even harder once you’re there.

When you read about an athlete or team that wins over and over and over, remind yourself, “More than ability, they have character.”

Remember this your lifetime through—

Tomorrow, there will be more to do.

And failure waits for all who stay

With some success made yesterday.

Tomorrow, you must try once more

And even harder than before.

### 31 Persistence Is Stronger than Failure

Abraham Lincoln is acknowledged as one of America's greatest presidents. Here is a brief summary of his career:

1831 — Failed in business

1832 — Defeated for legislature

1833 — Failed in business again

1834 — Elected to legislature

1835 — Sweetheart died

1836 — Had nervous breakdown

1838 — Defeated for speaker

1840 — Defeated for elector

1843 — Defeated for congressional nomination

1846 — Elected to Congress

1848 — Defeated for Congress

1855 — Defeated for Senate

1856 — Defeated for Vice President

1859 — Defeated for Senate

1860 — Elected President of the United States

Few people have suffered more personal, professional, and political adversity than Abraham Lincoln. He persisted in the face of failure and emerged victorious.

Another president, Calvin Coolidge, described it very well:

'Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.'

The model Mr. Lincoln gave us with his persistence is one we can remember in the face of our own setbacks. And what is most wondrous of all is that persistence is a quality that we ourselves control. You, and only you, can decide whether you will stay the course.

### 32 Always Be Progressing

You must never stand still. You’re either moving upward a little bit or you’re going the other way. You can’t expect to go upward too quickly, but you can sure go down very quickly.

The slide down happens in a hurry. Progress comes slowly but steadily if you are patient and prepare diligently.

Every member of every UCLA basketball team who ever played and practiced with us will tell you that one of my most common expressions was “Move, move, move!” I meant it both physically *and* mentally.

### 33 The Final Score

The “final score” is not the final score. My final score is how *prepared* you were to execute near your own particular level of competence, both individually and as a team.

There is nothing wrong with that other fellow being better than you are, as long as you did everything you possibly could to prepare yourself for the competition. That is all you have control over. That is all you should concern yourself with. It may be that the other fellow’s level of competency is simply higher than yours. That doesn’t make you a loser.

In 1962 in the Final Four against Cincinnati (who won the championship that year), we lost in the last few seconds of our semifinal game. However, Walter Hazzard, Gary Cunningham, Peter Blackman, John Green, Fred Slaughter, and the other UCLA players left the court as winners in my eyes.

I was disappointed that we lost, of course, but I had the greatest pride in how the team had performed and how they had prepared hard and progressed during the year.

We were almost 20 points down in the first ten minutes of the game and then came from behind to even it up at the half. We fought very hard in the second half and Cincinnati perhaps had superior personnel.

But what I saw out on the court during that game was a UCLA team that came as close as we could come to being the best that we could be. That’s a wonderful accomplishment! Goodness gracious sakes, am I proud of that effort. So proud, even now.

Was I disappointed we were outscored? I am *still* disappointed we were outscored—but I was never dejected. Mostly what I was, and am, is proud. Our team was outscored, but we were winners. I had the greatest pride in how the players prepared, progressed, and performed.

I felt this philosophy would have a much greater positive impact on the outcome of events than a stress on trying to outscore opponents. It’s a focus on improving yourself rather than comparing yourself to the other team as indicated by a score.

Furthermore, when you get too engrossed in those things over which you have no control, it will adversely affect those things over which you *do* have control—namely, your preparation.

You respect everyone. Then you simply make the strongest effort to prepare to the fullest extent of your abilities. The result will take care of itself, and you should be willing to accept it.

### 34 When to Be Dejected

You are entitled to be dejected when you know you didn't do what you should have done in preparing yourself to execute near your own ability level. Yes, then you have reason to be dejected.

But if you have prepared yourself properly, there is no reason to be downhearted. Disappointed, perhaps, but not excessively so.

The most disappointing thing that happened to me in basketball was losing the final game of the Indiana state high school championship by one single point. That was back in 1928 at Butler Field House in Indianapolis. We lost to Muncie Central 13-12 in the last seconds of the game on a shot that seemed to clear the rafters before it finally went through the basket.

When the buzzer signaled the end of that game, one that is still talked about by old-time Indiana basketball fans, most of my teammates broke down and cried. I did not. I believed I had done the best I could. I had prepared and played hard and knew it.

The team had prepared and played hard. I saw no reason to be overly distressed because we had lost a game, even a championship game. I wasn’t. Disappointed, of course, but not overly dejected and downhearted.

I felt even then that the more important question was, “Did I try to do all I could?” rather than “Did I win?” If the answer to the first question was, yes, then the answer to the second question was also, yes, regardless of the score.

There is nothing to be ashamed of when you prepared to the best of your ability. But you have ample cause to be dejected when you know you didn't prepare properly when you had the ability to do so.

### 35 Being Prepared

I used to say to an individual player who was unhappy because he wanted more playing time, “Young man, tell yourself, ‘I will be prepared and then perhaps my chance will come, because if it does come and I’m not ready, another chance may not come my way very soon again.’”

The time to prepare isn’t after you have been given the opportunity. It’s long before that opportunity arises. Once the opportunity arrives, it’s too late to prepare.

### 36 The Guaranteed Dividend

I believe one of the big lessons of sports for dedicated individuals and teams is that it shows us how hard work, and I mean *hard* work, does pay dividends.

The dividend is not *necessarily* in outscoring an opponent. The guaranteed dividend is the complete peace of mind gained in knowing you did everything within your power, physically, mentally, and emotionally, to bring forth your full potential.

I see the same self-satisfaction occurring in every area of our lives when we strive mightily to do our best, whether it’s working in a business or community or raising a family.

The great satisfaction that comes from trying to do your best is the guaranteed dividend.

### 37 Slow and Steady Gets You Ready

When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur. When you improve conditioning a little each day, eventually you have a big improvement in conditioning. Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made.

Don’t look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That’s the only way it happens—and when it happens, it lasts.